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SUBJECT: RUSSIA'S LOW-KEY RESPONSE ON SUDAN

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Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: Russia maintains its opposition to the ICC arrest warrant for Sudanese President Bashir, but will not actively pursue the warrant's deferral at the UNSC, according to the MFA. Russian officials met recently with African ambassadors who sought to maintain GOR opposition to the ICC warrant and argued that it infringed upon African sovereignty. Russia did nothing to prevent Sudan from expelling NGOs in retaliation for the ICC warrant, and may be sympathetic to Sudanese charges that the NGOs were engaged in espionage. Moscow does not intend to provide humanitarian aid to Sudan, despite suggestions of impending assistance made by the Russian President's special envoy to Sudan, Mikhail Margelov. The apparent disconnect between Margelov's public statements on Sudan, which give the impression that Russia seeks to play an active role in finding a solution to the situation, and Moscow's general reluctance to engage on Sudan in a positive manner, suggest that the special envoy may actually be promoting Russian economic interests in the region. End summary.

Russia Will Not Seek Deferral of ICC Warrant

12. (C) MFA Sudan desk officer Anton Shmakov reiterated for us on March 12 that Russia agreed with the African Union and Arab League position that the ICC's arrest warrant for Sudanese President Bashir should be deferred; failure to do so would hurt the chances for reaching a negotiated settlement between the various Sudanese factions (reftel). He stressed, however, that Russia would not actively pursue this course at the UNSC, leaving it up to other countries, such as Libya, to do so. Russia considered the efforts Bashir made toward implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) as having demonstrated his commitment to work toward a negotiated solution in Sudan, which would allow the UNSC to suspend prosecution for one year under Article 16 of the Rome Statute.

13. (C) The ambassadors of Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Sudan and South Africa met, at their request, on March 6 with DFM Saltanov to reinforce their opposition to the ICC warrant. According to a MFA statement, the ambassadors argued that the warrant infringed upon the sovereignty and legal rights of Sudan and other states in the region. Saltanov responded that Russia shared the concern of the African states that the warrant would only have negative consequences for the peace process in Sudan. Shmakov told us that during the meeting, the Kenyan Ambassador asked who would be the next target of an ICC arrest warrant, the Presidents of Kenya or Egypt?

No Reaction to NGO Expulsions

14. (C) There has been no official Russian reaction to Khartoum's expulsion of 13 humanitarian aid NGOs in response to the ICC warrant. Shmakov told us that he was not aware of any discussion of this issue within the MFA's Middle East and North Africa Department, which only considered the "political aspects" of the situation in Sudan. The GOR did not intervene with Sudan in advance of the NGOs' expulsion, nor did it ask that they be allowed back into the country or that Khartoum refrain from additional punitive attacks. Shmakov commented that after the ICC issued its warrant for Bashir, the Sudanese government had "no choice" but to react in the manner it did. He explained that during the African ambassadors' meeting with Saltanov, the Sudanese ambassador said that the threat presented to the humanitarian situation in Darfur by the expulsions was exaggerated, and accused the NGOs of having been involved in "espionage." (Comment: GOR security organs are quick to suspect international non-governmental organizations of serving more than humanitarian interests.)

15. (C) The Russian President's recently appointed special envoy for Sudan and Chairman of the Federation Council's International Affairs Committee, Mikhail Margelov, told the press on March 11 that Russia was considering sending emergency food and medical aid to Sudan. Russia did not intend to "fill the vacuum" created by the "departure" of the expelled NGOs, but would seek to "avoid a humanitarian catastrophe." Margelov made a similar comment to visiting UK Minister of State for Africa Malloch-Brown in their March 12 meeting, according to a British emboff. Despite such statements, the MFA Department for International Organizations told us on March 13 that Russia was not

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planning to send any aid to Sudan.

What is Russia's Interest in Sudan?

16. (C) When we asked Shmakov what motivated Medvedev to appoint a special envoy for Sudan in December 2008, he responded "our interests," which he enumerated as first, economic, particularly the prospect of cooperating with Sudan in the energy sector and winning contracts for infrastructure construction projects; second, the presence of Russian peacekeepers in the UN mission in Sudan; and third, Darfur, which is a "hot topic." He said Russia was interested in seeing the full implementation of the CPA between Khartoum and southern Sudan and the success of national elections to be held later this year.

Margelov's Role Unclear

17. (C) Shmakov expressed doubt about the effectiveness of Margelov's recent overtures toward Khartoum, made during his January trip to the region, especially the special envoy's proposal to hold an international conference on Sudan in Moscow in September. The Sudanese government did not want to see any further internationalization of the situation, and had resisted an Egyptian initiative to hold such a conference, according to Shmakov. He explained that actual coordination between the MFA and the President's special envoy was "limited," and that Margelov had only met on March 11 with senior MFA officials to discuss the Russian position on recent developments in Sudan.

Comment

18. (C) The apparent disconnect between Margelov's activism on Sudan and public pronouncements of aid, and the MFA's lackluster response, suggests that the President's special envoy does not necessarily speak for the GOR and may be attempting to put the best face on a Russian policy based upon advancing more narrow commercial interests.

